

# Educator Preparation for California

## The Accreditation Framework

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This Framework addresses the accreditation of colleges, universities and local education agencies that prepare teachers and other educators for state certification and professional practice in California public schools. Accreditation is the primary assurance of quality in the preparation of professional educators, and as such is an essential purpose of the Commission. It provides an important quality assurance to the education profession, the general public, and the accredited institutions. This Introduction to the Framework articulates the purposes of the accreditation system in the field of educator preparation.

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#### The Purposes of Professional Educator Program Accreditation

Professional accreditation is the process of ascertaining and verifying the quality of each program that prepares individuals for state certification. In this context, state certification is the process of ascertaining and verifying the qualifications of each future member of the education profession. These two processes -- professional accreditation and state certification share a common overarching objective -- ensuring that those who teach in California's public school system have the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to be effective classroom teachers. Accreditation of educator preparation in California serves to achieve the four primary purposes articulated below. It is the intent of this accreditation system to have an articulated accreditation and program review process across all educator preparation programs in California.

**A primary purpose the professional accreditation system is to ensure accountability** to the public, the students and the education profession that educator preparation programs are responsive to the educational needs of current and future students. Only an accredited teacher preparation program may recommend a candidate for a license to teach in California. The general public has a compelling interest in accreditation decisions that are part of the public education system in California. So do professionals whose work is judged by the accreditation system, or whose future success depends on its results and effectiveness. The expertise and experience of the accreditors should be credible to the general public and the education profession in California.

**A second purpose of accreditation is to ensure that educator preparation programs are high quality and effective** and provide education and experiences consistent with the knowledge and skills required of an educator serving the needs of the diverse population in the California public schools. The Commission has statutory responsibility for adopting accreditation standards which describe levels of quality that it deems to be acceptable for quality assurance. Standards should not focus on purely technical or operational aspects of educator preparation, but should enable trained reviewers with professional expertise to find out whether educator preparation in an institution is characterized by acceptable levels of quality as defined in the standards.

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The Accreditation system should be oriented to issues of quality. During a review, the reviewers need to obtain evidence that relates to the educational quality of preparation programs and policies within the institution. Through experience, expertise and training, the reviewers must be skilled at discerning the important from the unimportant in educator preparation. The findings and recommendations of accreditation reviewers should focus on important matters of quality in the preparation of educators. Accreditation decisions should hinge on findings that are educationally significant and clearly related to quality-oriented standards.

**A third purpose of the accreditation system is to ensure adherence to standards.** The standards are designed to ensure that each educator's preparation is appropriate to the requirements of professional service in public schools. California's educator preparation programs should be designed to meet the appropriate Commission approved program standards, which should be aligned with the state adopted academic content and performance standards for K-12 students. Through the accreditation system, educator preparation programs must provide evidence that the programs meet all standards.

**Finally, the fourth purpose of the accreditation system is to support program improvement.** Accreditation standards, reviews and decisions should contribute to improvements in the preparation of educators. The quality of an institution's policies, practices and outcomes should improve as its faculty, administrators and students strive to meet accreditation standards. The institution's offerings should also benefit from the quality orientation of the accreditation system. When these effects of accreditation fall short, however, specific accreditation decisions should also provoke needed improvements in educator preparation institutions. For improvements to occur, the accreditation system must identify and describe weaknesses in the quality of an institution's offerings [in preparing professionals to serve the needs of California's diverse student population.](#)

### **Key Attributes of Accreditation of California's Educator Preparation Programs**

The key attributes described below function within the four purposes of accreditation. These attributes pertain to the development of program standards, the initial program approval process, and the subsequent reviews and accreditation of educator preparation programs.

**First Attribute: The Professional Character of Accreditation.** Professional educators should hold themselves and their peers accountable for the quality of professional education. Professionals should be involved intensively in the entire accreditation process. They should create accreditation standards, conduct accreditation reviews, and make accreditation decisions. Participants in these aspects of accreditation should have experience, expertise and training that are appropriate for their specific roles in accreditation. In each step

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of accreditation, decisions should emerge from consultative procedures, and should reflect the consensus of the professional participants.

**Second Attribute: Knowledgeable Participants.** The effectiveness of the accreditation system relies on the quality of the decision making at each step in the process. Quality assurances are provided initially through the participation of individuals who possess knowledge, skills and broad expertise and who participate in the system in various roles, including policy development, policy implementation, program review, system support and technical management, and professional preparation. In order to fulfill these roles effectively, participants must receive appropriate, targeted training that enables them to understand the underlying principles and purposes of the system as well as how to enact each of these roles effectively [in meeting the needs of all learners in California's schools.](#)

**Third Attribute: Breadth and Flexibility.** For institutions to be effective in a dynamic state like California, they must be creative and responsive to the changing needs of prospective educators. In a society as diverse as California, universities and colleges often vary substantially in their missions and philosophies. Accreditation should not force institutions to conform to prescribed patterns unless these conventions have a firm basis in principles of educational quality, effectiveness and equity. The accreditation system should accommodate breadth and flexibility within and among institutions to support program improvement.

Accreditation standards should be drawn so different institutions can meet them in a variety of acceptable ways. There are acceptable and unacceptable forms of educator preparation; accreditation should differentiate between them. There are also multiple ways of educating prospective educators acceptably; accreditation should not favor any of these over the others. Standards should describe levels of quality and effectiveness without stipulating how institutions are to comply. Explanations of the standards should clarify their meaning without making the standards overly restrictive. The training of accreditation reviewers should, moreover, emphasize the importance of acknowledging institutional diversity and creativity.

**Fourth Attribute: Intensity in Accreditation.** Accreditation should focus with intensity on key aspects of educational quality and effectiveness. While allowing and encouraging divergence among programs and institutions, the process should also be exacting in assembling key information about critical aspects of educational quality and effectiveness. The scope of accreditation should be comprehensive, and the information generated by the review processes should be sufficient to yield reliable judgments by professional educators.

Accreditation standards should encompass the critical dimensions of educator preparation. In order to recommend an institution for accreditation, experienced professional reviewers should be satisfied that the institution provides a comprehensive array of excellent learning opportunities and assurances that future educators have demonstrated that they have attained the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to be effective

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professionals..

Accreditation decisions should be based on information that is sufficient in breadth and depth for the results to be credible and dependable. Accreditation reviewers should understand the components of the program under review and the types of standards-based evidence that substantiate its overall quality and effectiveness. To find out if broad, quality-oriented standards are met, and to make reliable judgments and sound recommendations, reviewers need to assemble a considerable body of data that is collectively significant.

**Fifth Attribute: Efficiency and Cost-Effectiveness.** An accreditation system should fulfill its purposes efficiently and cost-effectively. Review procedures, decision processes and reporting relationships should be streamlined and economical. Participants' roles should be clearly defined, and communications should be efficient.

There are costs associated with establishing standards, training reviewers, assembling information, preparing reports, conducting meetings and checking the accuracy of data and the fairness of decisions. Containing these costs is an essential attribute of accreditation, but efficiency must not undermine the capacity of accreditors to fulfill their responsibilities to the public and the profession. Accreditation costs, which are borne by institutions, individual accreditors and the accrediting body, should be reviewed periodically by the Commission in relation to the key purposes of accreditation.